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Advocates push for changes to charter school system

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RALEIGH – Education advocates say there needs to be changes to North Carolina's charter school system, or the system may be in danger of losing potential federal funding.

Charter Day School Headmaster says under the state's current structure for charter schools, it is difficult for rural or inner-city charter schools to keep up with other charter schools.

“They're going to invest their time, money and effort into opening a school, and if they don't make 60 percent the first two out of three years, the state board comes in and shuts them down,” Mitchell said.

Several state leaders said Tuesday at a press conference that they agree the system needs to change. Citing the current legal cap on charter schools at 100 and what they call inequitable funding, the group says the bottom line is that current state leaders are not doing enough to help public schools.

“You have an administration that basically so far has payed lip service to charter schools, but not full supported it,” Richard Vinroot, chair of Charlotte's Sugar Creek Charter School, said.

In a recent report by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, North Carolina was ranked 32nd out of 40 states for its charter school policies. Advocates say as the state is fighting to win federal money, current state restrictions are fighting against them.

“Many of us ask the question of instead of racing to the top for this critical funding, is North Carolina in fact racing to the bottom?” said Darrell Allison, president of Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina.

Those advocates say they believe the first step toward improving charter schools in North Carolina should begin in the legislative building in Raleigh. They say lawmakers should immediately lift the cap on the number of charter schools allowed in the state.